

*Darling Queen — Dear old Bones*



Miss Elizabeth Saxton Winter on the completion of her duties as governess in 1896, a position that she took up in 1886. Photograph: De Lavieter & Co.

# *Darling Queen* ~ *Dear old Bones*

Queen Wilhelmina's Correspondence  
with her English Governess  
Miss Elizabeth Saxton Winter, 1886–1935

*Edited by Emerentia van Heuven-van Nes*

Amsterdam University Press

Amsterdam University Press

The publication of this book is made possible by grants from:

- Geschiedkundige Vereniging Oranje-Nassau
- Jan Menze van Diepen Stichting
- Koninklijke Vereniging van Leden der Nederlandse Ridderorden
- Private Foundation
- Stichting Elise Mathilde Fonds
- Stichting Fonds A.H. Martens van Sevenhoven
- Stichting Historische Verzamelingen van het Huis Oranje-Nassau



*Elise Mathilde*

Originally published as: *Dear old Bones. Brieven van Koningin Wilhelmina aan haar Engelse gouvernante Miss Elizabeth Saxton Winter, 1886–1935.*

Bezorgd door Emerentia van Heuven-van Nes. Uitgeverij THOTH, Bussum 2012

© 2012 Emerentia van Heuven-van Nes en Uitgeverij THOTH

With special thanks to THOTH Publishers for the re-use of the colour images.

Translation: Vivien Collingwood

Cover illustration: Queen Wilhelmina, February 1896. Photograph:

H.R.F. Kameke, The Hague

Cover design: Suzan Beijer

Lay-out: Sander Pinkse Boekproductie

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 94 6298 438 7

e-ISBN 978 90 4853 504 0

DOI 10.5117/9789462984387

NUR 698

© Emerentia van Heuven-van Nes / Amsterdam University Press B.V.,  
Amsterdam 2017

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes to have rights to this material is advised to contact the publisher.

# Table of contents

Foreword to English edition by Simon J.H. Smits	7
Foreword	9
Biographical sketch of Queen Wilhelmina, 1880–1962	14
Biographical sketch of Elizabeth Saxton Winter, 1855–1936	17
About the letters	29
The letters 1886–1935	37
Conclusion	315
Sources	318
Family Trees	324
Illustration credits	332
Index	333



## Foreword to English edition

Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands is best known for her role during World War II. When Germany invaded the Netherlands on 10 May 1940, Wilhelmina issued a proclamation to the nation of ‘flaming protest’. A few days later however, and very much against her will, she had to leave her beloved country for England with her family and members of the Cabinet. Through her radio broadcasts from London during World War II, she became the symbol of Dutch resistance to the Nazi occupation. She won respect and admiration, proving that a woman was as capable as a man in leading her people through difficult times.

Less well known is that the young Wilhelmina as a princess was already familiar with England, thanks to her governess Miss Winter, who taught her the English language from a very young age. In 1895, Wilhelmina visited Queen Victoria, who noted that the young Queen ‘*speaks good English and knows how to behave with charming manners*’.

Miss Winter also had great influence in shaping Wilhelmina’s developing personality. Known as a bold woman herself, she embodied the positive British spirit. Miss Winter saw it as her mission to make the Princess ‘a bold and noble woman’. Miss Winter most certainly succeeded in this, as we learn from none other than Winston Churchill himself. He described Wilhelmina as ‘the only real man’ among the governments-in-exile in London.

Wilhelmina holds the record for the longest-reigning Dutch monarch, 50 years. Especially for members of Royal families, it is always difficult to get a real insight into what truly drives them. That is what makes this book so unique. Wilhelmina and Miss Winter maintained a very personal and frank correspondence for nearly 50 years. This gives us readers a unique insight in the life of an extraordinary woman – who described herself in her memoirs as ‘lonely, but not alone’.

Simon J.H. Smits

Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the United Kingdom





## Foreword

When Marion Crawford — the governess to Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret, the daughters of the British King George VI and his wife Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon — published her recollections of life at court in a book entitled *The Little Princesses* in 1950, the royal family immediately severed all contact with her.<sup>1</sup> The precious relationship that she had always enjoyed with the royal family had been damaged by her actions. How could she have taken it into her head to expose the internal affairs of the court? The damage proved to be irreparable. This could also have been the fate of Miss Elizabeth Saxton Winter, the governess to Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands between 1886 and 1896 and one of the two principal figures in this book.

After her honourable dismissal in 1896 having completed her duties as a governess, at the beginning of the twentieth century Miss Winter asked Wilhelmina's permission, as far as the queen understood it, to write about her time in the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup> The queen agreed to her request by telegram. In the summer of 1904, however, it proved that Miss Winter was in fact writing about her time at the Dutch court and her relationship with Wilhelmina herself. The latter was 'not amused' and wrote to her mother Emma, who paid Miss Winter's pension, asking her to keep an eye on the ex-governess. 'I shall make you responsible for what she writes.' Things ultimately turned out better than expected when Miss Winter's recollections were published in the American women's magazine *The Ladies' Home Journal* between November 1908 and January 1909. A Dutch translation by Henriette S.S. Kuyper was subsequently published, with the title *Toen onze Koningin nog Prinsesje was* [*When our queen was just a little princess*].<sup>3</sup> Miss Winter escaped Marion Crawford's fate and the contact was not broken, although it would become less frequent.

In 1989, the then director of the Paleis Het Loo National Museum in Apeldoorn, Dr Adriaan W. Vliegthart, asked me whether I wanted to manage an upcoming exhibition on the regency of Queen Emma. In 1990, it would be one hundred years since she had become regent on behalf of her daughter, Wilhelmina, who was then still a minor. Wilhelmina had become queen at the age of ten on 23 November 1890 after the death of her father, King Willem III, but she was still too young to be able to govern. The regency had been an important period and would form an interesting subject for an exhibition.

1 For literature citations in the notes, only the author's surname (written in bold in the bibliography) has been cited, followed by page references. See Crawford. On 8 May 2004, I was informed by Prof. C.A. Tamse that there is an English expression 'to do a crawfie', meaning to commit an indiscretion. Marr, pp. 81–85.

2 Fasseur 1998, pp. 275–276.

3 Winter.

Emma's role had been an extremely difficult one. Not only was she the first queen to rule in the Netherlands, but she was also a foreigner, aged just 32, whose primary interlocutors were old men and who had to carve out a role for herself in the Netherlands. In addition, her only child had to be brought up to reign as queen in just eight years. Moreover, there was a need to breathe new life into the bond between the royal family and the Dutch people, which had been neglected by King Willem III, by appearing in public — something that had already been done on the king's seventieth birthday in 1887 — and to ascertain that 'we are still here'. This statement became the title of the exhibition.<sup>4</sup>

I was responsible for the themes 'Emma's youth and marriage' and 'The education of Queen Wilhelmina'. Whilst undertaking research in the Royal Archives in The Hague, I came across the correspondence between Wilhelmina and her English governess, Miss Elizabeth Saxton Winter (1855–1936), who had served the family between 1886 and 1896.<sup>5</sup> To my great astonishment, these unique letters had never been used.<sup>6</sup> Was this because there had been no occasion to do so? Or was it because they were mostly 'merely' a child's letters and, later on, letters from a young girl/young woman? Were they not sufficiently interesting? Apparently not, thought Mr R. de Beaufort, an employee of the Dutch embassy in London, who was the first to investigate the letters in 1967 when there was a possibility they might be sold. 'The whole collection is not of great value. I cannot imagine that anyone would show a great interest in them.'

In 1965, Henriette L[aman] T[rip] de Beaufort wrote her book *Wilhelmina 1880–1962, een levensverhaal* [*Wilhelmina, 1880–1962: A life*], a biography commissioned by the then Dutch Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences. She had no knowledge of the letters. The letters from Miss Saxton Winter to Wilhelmina had been destroyed by the latter during her lifetime, and Mrs de Beaufort thus made no mention of a correspondence between the two. However, the biographer did frequently cite the abovementioned memoir by Miss Winter. In 1972, ten years after Wilhelmina's death, Fred J. Lammers wrote *Wilhelmina, Moeder des Vaderlands* [*Wilhelmina, Mother of the Nation*]. By then, Wilhelmina's letters had been deposited in the Royal Archives, but he did not refer to them. He did refer, however, to the interesting notes on the private lessons that

4 The following seven themes were covered in the exhibition: I Introduction with historical background to and the situation of the House of Orange around 1890 and the beginning of the regency; II Emma's youth and marriage; III The education of Queen Wilhelmina; IV Governing the country; V Visiting the country; VI The queen-regent and the history of the House of Orange; and VII The end of the regency.

5 Royal Archives, G27. Items originating from Miss Saxton Winter, acquired from Miss H.I. Spanton in 1967. The letters were categorized into 26 non-chronological items, a categorization that was maintained after they were acquired.

6 It is striking that Boekholt, in his chapter in the 1990 book edited by C.A. Tamse, *Koningin Emma Opstellen over haar regentschap en voogdij* [*Queen Emma: Essays on her Regency and Guardianship*], entitled 'Emma en de opvoeding van Wilhelmina [Emma and Wilhelmina's upbringing]', did not use Wilhelmina's letters to Miss Winter. However, he did use the notes made by the tutor Gediking, whom he repeatedly called 'Gedeking' (see following note).

Wilhelmina received from her tutor Fredrik Gediking, at which Miss Winter was always present.<sup>7</sup> The next person to write a biography of Wilhelmina, which he spent many years researching, was Prof. A.F. Manning. He would pass away in 1991 before the work was completed, although he did publish a chapter about the queen in a book entitled *Nassau en Oranje*.<sup>8</sup> Cees Fasseur took over Manning's work and published a biography of Wilhelmina in two volumes in 1998 and 2001, respectively.<sup>9</sup> Naturally, he also cited the now-familiar letters from Wilhelmina to Miss Winter. He did believe that they were of value, arguing that they shed 'interesting new light' on her youth, especially the years surrounding the investiture.<sup>10</sup>

In the meantime, in 1995, in addition to the letters from Emma and Juliana, eighteen letters from Wilhelmina were published for the first time, edited by L.B. Romeyn.<sup>11</sup> This concerned seven letters written between 1898 and 1908 to her second cousin Princess Marie of the Netherlands,<sup>12</sup> who married Wilhelm, the Prince of Wied, in 1871, and eleven letters written between 1910 and 1934 to her favourite lady-in-waiting, Marie Snoeck,<sup>13</sup> who had married Mr Frans Beelaerts van Blokland in 1905 and gone to live in Peking, where her husband was the Dutch ambassador. Van Osta provided an introduction and the notes.

For my part, I used Wilhelmina's unique letters to her governess not only for the exhibition about Emma, but also for other publications and exhibitions at Paleis Het Loo.<sup>14</sup> I also drew others' attention to this rich source material, full of interesting details relating to their specific subjects, whether these might be fashion, souvenirs, horses, or Wilhelmina's own paintings.<sup>15</sup> Gredy Huisman, who published her book *Tussen salon en souterrain. Gouvernantes in Nederland*

7 Fredrik Gediking (1852–1902), head teacher at the grammar school on Schelpkade in Scheveningen, recorded in fifty notebooks the preparation for and outcomes of the 1,215 lessons that he gave to Queen Wilhelmina between 3 January 1887 and 20 April 1897. At the time, the notebooks were in the possession of his granddaughter, Mrs A.P. Loosjes of Harderwijk. On the occasion of the exhibition 'Wij zijn er nog [We are still here]', she gave them to the Paleis Het Loo National Museum in Apeldoorn in 1990, inv.no. RI.3098 (Lammers, p.13, Van Heuven 1989, p. 28).

8 Manning.

9 Fasseur 1998 and 2001.

10 Fasseur 1998, p. 152.

11 Osta, pp. 47–85.

12 Marie of the Netherlands (1841–1910) was the daughter of Prince Frederik (1797–1881), the brother of King Willem II (1792–1849), and Princess Louise of Prussia (1808–1870). On 18 July 1871 she married Wilhelm, the Prince of Wied (1845–1907).

13 Marie Snoeck's full name was Adriana Maria Snoeck (1873–1948). She entered royal service on 10 July 1900 as the successor to Idzardina Juliana Frederika 'Pixy' de Constant Rebecque (1877–1958). Emma and Wilhelmina were very fond of Marie. On 30 May 1905, she married Mr Frans Beelaerts van Blokland (1872–1956), whose positions included envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary in Peking, Minister of Foreign Affairs and vice-president of the Council of State. Pixy de Constant Rebecque, see letter 51, note 71.

14 Heuven 1990, 1992, 2003, 2004, 2008, Spliethoff 2006.

15 Meij, Rooseboom, Spliethoff 2006, Conijn.

[*Between the drawing room and below stairs: Governesses in the Netherlands*] in 2000, did not tackle the subject of governesses at the Dutch court: 'their duties were of a very special nature', she wrote, without further explanation.<sup>16</sup>

No complete edition of Wilhelmina's letters had yet been produced, however, despite my having expressed this intention to the then director of the Royal Archives in the 1990s. Although I had transferred Wilhelmina's letters in English to my computer, I had not had sufficient time to work on them. I only managed to do so after my retirement in 2009.

At that time, Her Majesty Queen Beatrix granted me permission to publish the letters in full, something for which I am very grateful. Owing to circumstances at the time, the letters were first published in Dutch translation.<sup>17</sup> Now, in 2017, they are being published in their original English form, along with additional letters, including sixteen letters from Miss Winter that have since been discovered. It would have been impossible to write this book without the assistance of the Royal Archives in The Hague. Once again, the director of the Royal Archives, Ph.C.B. Maarschalkerweerd, and all of the staff of this private royal archive proved to be of inestimable value. I would like to extend a special word of thanks to the archivists Mrs Ch.J.M. Eymael and Mrs H.J. de Muij-Fleurke for their critical reading of the manuscript, and to Mr L.J.A. Pennings for his tireless provision of relevant details and for always responding so quickly to my numerous emails asking all manner of questions. I would also like to express my special gratitude for the fact that I was once again permitted to use illustrations from the archive, which is administered by Mrs M.S. Jansen, on a 'pro deo' basis. I am extremely grateful to the former director of the Royal Archives, B. Woelderink, with whom I had discussed the publication of the letters back in the 1990s, for his critical reading and comments on the introductory chapters. I am also grateful to the director of the Paleis Het Loo National Museum, M. van Maarseveen, and my former colleagues Marieke E. Spliethoff, George Sanders, Paul Rem, Anne Dirk Renting, Niels Coppes, Angelique van den Eerenbeemd, Liesbeth Schothorst and Mariska Dumas for their expertise and for their answers to my questions. I am grateful to the director for permitting me to publish the photographs for this publication from the museum's collection on a 'pro deo' basis, as well as to all the individuals, with special thanks to Archduke Markus Habsburg-Lothringen, Bad Ischl (Austria) and Gregor Antolčić, Limbus (Slovenia), and to the institutions that provided photographs. Their names are listed in the photo credits. A special word of gratitude for Kees van den Hoek, director of THOTH Publishers, Bussum, the Netherlands, who published the Dutch edition of this book with the title *Dear old Bones — Brieven van Koningin Wilhelmina aan haar Engelse gouvernante Miss Elizabeth Saxton Winter, 1886–1935*, in 2012, and gave us the use of all the colour plates for free. Credit is also due to

<sup>16</sup> Huisman, p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> Emerentia van Heuven-van Nes, *Dear old Bones. Brieven van koningin Wilhelmina aan haar Engelse gouvernante Miss Elizabeth Saxton Winter 1886–1935*, Bussum 2012.

my husband, Jan Willem, as yet more of our free time was devoted to preparing this English edition.

It would not have been possible to publish this book without the support of a number of funds and foundations, and I am extremely grateful to them. Their names are listed on page 4.

These days, when so many books are published and it is thus more difficult than ever to find a publisher for such a specialized subject, I was extremely glad that Jan-Peter Wissink, the director of Amsterdam University Press, also recognized the importance of this unique personal source material and appreciated the value of publishing it in its original language. I have always enjoyed a pleasant, constructive working relationship with Inge van der Bijl, the commissioning editor, and all her colleagues.

I am particularly pleased that interested parties from beyond the Netherlands will now be able to become acquainted with these unique personal letters, which also cover relations with the royal houses of Europe, including those of Great Britain, Habsburg, Italy, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Romania, Saxe-Coburg, Saxe-Weimar, Spain, Waldeck-Pyrmont and Wied. The photographs in this book depict many royal figures. How an ostensibly 'age-old' photograph could suddenly become very real and relevant was brought home to me during a visit to Metfried, the Prince of Wied, in September 2016. When he saw the photograph of the Wied family (shown on p. 190) gathered around a radiant and proud figure, the youngest son and heir, Prince Hermann, wearing a splendid white dress, his little head covered with a feathered cap, sitting on the lap of his great-grandmother, the widowed Marie of Wied, Princess of Nassau, he said: 'That is my father.' It was an unexpected and surprising remark, which suddenly made the photograph in this book feel very topical.

My hope is that reading the heart-felt and spontaneous letters of Queen Wilhelmina will offer a deeper insight into her psyche than all of the biographies that have been written about her.